

SOCIALIST DISCUSSION JOURNAL  
TOWARDS BETTER UNDERSTANDING

# FORUM

## Population and Plenty

It is the opinion of J. D'Arcy, stated in his lectures on "Food and Plenty," that the low birth rate in industrialised European countries is due to high protein intake. That statistical evidence supposedly showing a correlation in Asian countries between a low protein intake and a high birth rate throws light on the consistent trend in industrialised countries towards a falling rate. The object of this article is to deny this contention by offering an alternative argument to account for the falling birth rate in Britain.

Since the last decades of the 19th century, the number of children born into the average family has decreased. This is illustrated by the following table:—

Women born between 1841-51  
and recorded as married in 1911  
had 5.7 children

Women born between 1861-65  
and recorded as married in 1911  
had 4.7 children

Women married between 1900-09  
had 3.4 children

Women married between 1925-29  
had 2.2 children

The population trends that accompany industrialisation have been seen to conform to three definite stages. They begin with a period when there is no social mechanism for the control of either the birth or death rates. This period lasted, in Britain, until approximately the 1870's. The dispossessed labourer, pauperized and hungry, went north to textile and mine, to concentrated industry where work was to be had for wages. Also the large ports and London were assimilating many workers. But with the labourer went no plan, no social precedent to the housing of thousands of workers over virgin industrial sites, nothing but a narrow speculative landlordism to cater for his accommodation needs. Laissez-faire precluded any effective control on the part of a centralised authority over minimum standards of housing, sewage, and water supply. All this and intense overcrowding resulted in a high birth rate with both high infant and adult mortality rates.

Cholera and typhus are quite indiscriminate, and with capitalism's need of reformism, *laissez-faire* was a stupid doctrine. Our second stage begins with the development of medical services and increased sanitation. By the 1870's much legislation affecting public health had been passed. Rural and Urban sanitary authorities with a compulsory medical officer for public health were being supervised by a centralised board. As a result the adult and infant mortality rate was curtailed and the average age of the population increased.

The turn of the century was the beginning of the third stage when both the death rate and the birth rate became lowered thus resulting in a further increase in the average age of the population. The 1870's saw the final consolidation of the working class as a rigid economic category. With the breadwinner's dependence on his wages for family survival, children up to the time when they could earn their own living were

a definite economic liability. A little later, Annie Besant, the Fabian, and many voluntary social workers went from door to door, advising family limitation as a means of ameliorating poverty. Another child was one more mouth to feed, and save for these days of slightly reduced tax and nominal family allowance, this had to be done on the same sized wage packet. Within the working class there is a stratification of status accorded mainly by occupational groupings. As elementary education became universal, workers became conscious that the avenue of mobility between these groups was mainly education. As the refrigerator is mainly an object of conspicuous consumption, so the child is often made an object for conspicuous comparison. Man does not live on bread alone. A child wants education, school caps, blazers and capitalism's phoney "good manners." For all this modest emulation of the wealthy is the insignia of status and respectability. But all this costs money. As more children are born into a family, so is the scope for conspicuous comparison narrowed. The process of family limitation becomes rationalised by the stigma on large families. Urged by the acute labour shortage of two world wars, the taboo on married women working in industry is now swept away. The extra funds that married women can earn, helps to pay for the "luxury" consumer goods that the development of light engineering has brought. More in children means less in carpets, cars, mortgages and leisure time. Professional workers facing deteriorating standards, find it increasingly difficult to patronise the theatre, employ domestics and keep their offspring at traditional schools.

When the family was a productive unit, new hands were welcome. The State has taken over many former functions of the family such as care of the aged, the sick, the education of the young. But the State has not taken over the responsibility for the physical support of the young. The propertyless worker can only view with apprehension any further charge on his pay packet.

P.P.

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# Production and History

"History (as I see it) is accumulation of wealth, its starting point the act of production itself which continuously creates more wealth out of less labour and thus compels more and more equal diffusion of wealth as creation of heat is followed by equal diffusion." (F. EVANS: FORUM, December, 1954).

If Evans had any real knowledge of history he would have entertained grave doubts about his views. Actually he couldn't care less about history. What he is attempting to do is to demonstrate what he believes are current socio-economic trends. His theory of history is designed to give them a historic plausibility which is neither historic nor plausible.

What Evans asks us to accept is that in some remote past—"the first productive act"—there began some form of technological evolution which has continued in some sort of cumulative manner through all subsequent ages; with, of course, its concomitant evolution of tools and techniques—"proliferation of artefacts" which "created more wealth out of less labour." Thus ever-increasing wealth has meant ever-increasing wealth diffusion and, says Evans in the same article, ever-increasing social equality, finally resulting in absolute equality—Socialism. There is thus, according to Evans, an absolute law of social evolution to which everything is subject. According to Marx it has been the social relations of production which, during the course of history, have regulated the distribution of the social product: according to Evans it is production itself and its associated techniques. One can only ask with Othello-like despair: "Proof, give me proof!"

To begin, there is not the slightest evidence that prehistoric man accumulated more and more wealth out of less and less labour, or that in any significant sense he accumulated wealth at all. For thousands of years the "jam" of economic progress was thinly—very thinly—spread over the crust of the earth which men inhabited. In modern idiom, primitive society was a low production economy. What perhaps is instructive is that if Evans's thesis of greater production producing greater social equality were true, early social organization must have been a very unequal affair. Evidence exists to suggest that it had greater equality, in fact, than subsequent social set-ups where productive output was greater.

True, greater productivity resulted when tribes stopped killing their captives and set them to work. This type of productivity was further enhanced when slavery became institutionalized. Again, the discovery of fire, the use of bronze, iron, the domestication of animals and cultivation were productive watersheds, enabling greater security and stability of social life. Such gains were

very slow and uneven, and even then the social organizations partially or wholly including them were static, not expanding, economies. When one remembers that even the high-powered capitalist system with vast technical resources has in the last fifty years increased its production by an annual average of between one and two per cent., one wonders what sorts of increases were possible in societies of sheep-grazing, primitive agriculture and individual handicraft production. If the ability to produce more wealth in a shorter time had been a cumulatively constant feature of society, Hengist and Horsa could have brought the Industrial Revolution to Britain and King Alfred's cake-burning would then have been thermostatically controlled.

Again, can it be seriously maintained that antique society was a progressive economic set-up? There could have been no incentive for capital investment in a society where slaves were the main productive force and constituted both means and instruments of production. Such a system, operating largely through production for use, could find little scope for increased profit-margins *via* the instrumentality of labour-saving devices. In actual fact, the great slave empires were, overall, not fabrics of productive progress but of decline. Even the Roman Empire, most progressive of all of them, was economically less advanced in its closing centuries than in its beginning.

Again, what proof is there that the thousand years following the break-up of the Roman Empire produced greater efficiency in industry and agriculture than in Roman or even Greek times? It is not suggested here that all ages prior to the Industrial Revolution were completely stagnant productively. The end of the Middle Ages saw the introduction of the fulling mill and water wheel. Undoubtedly the growth of trade in the Middle Ages quickened the tempo which led in turn to greater differentiation between the crafts and so promoted increased production. Nevertheless, Feudalism was a system of low productivity, a system of petty production and narrow markets. For all practical purposes it consumed what it produced. One thing can be said with confidence: its output was too meagre to allow for any form of capital accumulation—the only means in private-property society of cumulatively expanding the productive apparatus.

It is true that a certain section of society, the growing bourgeoisie, did begin to enrich itself. Unlike the craftsmen earning a modest competence through production and petty retailing, they were able with the growth of trade to control the more distant markets and so buy cheap and sell dear. The point to remember is that wealth accumulated not inside but outside of industry: not through increasing produc-

tivity but, by and large, through the depression of the living standards of many of the working population. Feudalism gave no indication of increasing wealth-diffusion. It was, in fact, a system based on surplus labour presupposing a servile and dependent section of society. In spite of Thorold Rogers's somewhat idyllic pictures of certain periods of Feudalism, the weight of historical evidence suggests that feudal obligation lay heavy on the backs of the majority of producers, and life in the main was hard and austere.

Feudalism proper, so far from being a system of productive innovation, was a static set-up hallowed by tradition and custom, where men were destined to remain in that station of life to which it had pleased God to call them. Evolution and progress would have been regarded as aberrations of Nature. Indeed, the very concept of evolution as a law of social development could itself only be adequately formulated as a result of the economic turmoil and change wrought by the Industrial Revolution.

Even when we come up to the glittering Elizabethan era, when the bourgeois elite had become a junior partner in the Tudor dynasty, there is no evidence of any significant changes in the productive forces. There is evidence of increased wealth and luxury, but it was derived largely from foreign adventure and a highly lucrative slave trade where 50 per cent. was deemed a modest return for capital outlay.

For that reason, the *nouveaux riches* of the Tudor era paid little attention to the development of industry. Undoubtedly there was, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a marked impetus for industrial development: Marx called them the manufacturing period. It consisted of groups of craftsmen, each group under one roof; while it led to greater sub-division, the craftsmen used the same tools as before—and the tools mostly, moreover, were their own.

The capitalist of this period was primarily a merchant, making an attempt to escape from the monopolistic restrictions of the guilds and the chartered co-operatives. It was the beginning of the penetration of capital into petty production and domestic industry. In time the merchant became more interested in production than in buying and selling. Thus he became more and more an industrial organizer, subordinating the dependent craftsman to the discipline of collective labour. He was a historic link in the development of industrial capitalism. Nevertheless, from the standpoint of that mode of production which characterizes Capitalism, this was still a precapitalist mode. It was not an incipient form of industrial capitalism imperceptibly developing in the Tudor and Stuart periods.

Even such a development was greatly



hampered by Tudor and Stuart regulations. The still-not-inconsiderable, though declining, powers of the merchant guilds and the political influence and economic strength of the yeomanry—nascent capitalist farmers—who needed a plentiful supply of cheap agricultural labour based on a semi-proletarian rural population. There could have been no overall, increasing technical development in the periods mentioned because the productive force was not to hand in the shape of large masses of producers without resources, whose energies could be bought on the market like any other commodity. It had to wait until the enclosures of the eighteenth century before this new productive force appeared without which Capitalism could not function.

Similarly, it had to wait for the funds, *i.e.*, Primary Accumulation, to finance and set going a whole series of inventions round which the now-considerable proletariat could be organized. Then and only then could industry be transformed from petty production to large-scale industrial processes. The crucial inventions were Hargreaves' spinning jenny, Arkwright's water frame and Cartwright's power loom.

Some have said that these inventions were the outcome of the scientific discoveries of the seventeenth century: advances in chemistry like Boyle's work on the pressure of gases and Huygens's study of circular motion. But it must be remembered that the scientific ferment of that period was itself to a great extent the outcome of problems and experiences occasioned by the opening-up of the world, now immeasurably richer and more complex than before and one in which economic development not only posed questions but clamoured for answers.

Moreover, this type of scientific investigation could not of itself have been brought into practical application. Had it been possible for these scientific theories to have been formulated a century earlier, they would have remained mere scientific curiosities. In actual fact they were not the work of scientists so much as of practical men attempting to cope with the specific problems thrown up to the circumstances of the time. Only a favourable economic milieu could have given the stimulus for such activities and the type of mind to put them into practice.

Actually, the greatest increases in wealth production during the period prior to the Industrial Revolution came from agriculture. One of the results of land expropriation was that many smallholdings became absorbed for purposes of cultivation into the farms of what might be called "Tudor kulaks." Such a process was advantageous to the landowner, who could obtain a higher rent because of a higher agricultural yield. Farming on a larger scale became more efficient, and this, coupled with the growth of localized industry, began the separation of town from country. Thus the country became a market for the products of the town—an indispensable condition for capitalist industry.

The Enclosure Acts, although their carrying-out was relatively independent of Primary Accumulation and the penetration of capital into petty industry, were nevertheless one of the crucial factors in the establishment of Capitalism. Not only did they provide the stimulus for the indispensable "Agricultural Revolution," but as has been seen they provided at their peak period—the latter part of the eighteenth century—a mass of proletarianised elements sufficiently mobile and numerous to be grouped round the gigantic tools of production made possible by the series of inventions already enumerated. Thus ample opportunity was provided for capital investment, which came largely from Whig sources from which the nineteenth-century industrial capitalist split off under the banner of "Liberalism" or "Free Trade."

Nevertheless, the mercantilist phase preceding the Industrial Revolution was of a monopolistic and restrictive character. Consequently there were strong counter-tendencies against all development of industrial capital. Thus, the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and even the opening decades of the eighteenth contain no real hint of the cataclysmic character of the Industrial Revolution. From the standpoint of expanding overall production, the stream of industrial output flowed comparatively sluggishly down the centuries. It was not until the eighteenth century that this flow quickened until it was a torrent. That, I think, disposes of Evans's assertion that social epochs are merely the quantitative levels reached in a process of imperceptible evolution: "the last drops which fill the bucket."

Compared, then, with all past development, the main branches of British industry were transformed with astonishing speed. The Industrial Revolution was not just the culminating act of some quantitative evolution but a departure from all previous productive norms; not the culmination of an ever-expanding "proliferation of artefacts" but a radical change. It was a change from petty industry, *i.e.*, manufactory and handicraft industry subordinated to capital, to large-scale power-motivated production where the worker was under the direct control and supervision of the capitalist and now completely divorced from the means of production.

From then on, the economic pattern of society underwent a transformation. True, capitalist society continued to evolve, but it was an evolution peculiar to itself. "Every society," says Marx, "has the laws of its own development." For Evans there is no development inherent in capitalism—there is only a law of absolute social development, of which capitalism is an aspect. That is why he cannot see crucial change or any novelty in the historical process. He holds actually a naive "simple-to-complex" theory of historic evolution based on the Comte-Spencer model. He thus sees every stage of history as a more complex version of the previous stage. Industrial Capitalism is a

more complex form of Mercantilism, which was a more complex reflection of Feudalism, which in turn was a developed version of antique society finally derived from Asiatic society. And seeing that Socialism is merely Capitalism writ larger, primitive society was really Socialism in its most incipient form. Whether Evans really believes that I do not know, but his theory of absolute evolution demands it. As a theory of history it is childish.

It is true to say that economic categories such as money, commodities and exchange-value existed in past societies, but such categories did not produce a capitalist mode of production any more than a French peasantry makes France a feudal country. Again, there may be elements of past societies in extant social life, in either retarded or advanced forms, but they do not affect the capitalist mode of production significantly.

Again, it is perfectly true that capitalism was linked with former development, as has been sketchily shown. But such linkages are not the automatic outcome of some simple, one-factor theory such as Evans's proliferation of artefacts—or, to put his views more concisely, the passive result of technological development. Such views are in reality perversions of Marxism.

Many historians (quite a few of them non-Marxists) have seen the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries as a transitional period between Feudalism and Industrial Capitalism. Some, like Pirenne, even date it back to the fourteenth century. But one must be careful what is meant by the term "transition." It does not mean that the main features of the specific mode of production typified by Capitalism were growing up bit by bit in the old economy. In short, there was no organic development. Industrial capitalism was not a continuation of, but a departure from, the older methods of production. It is true that trade had developed, but trade and Capitalism are not necessarily synonymous. Neither was the appearance of a wealthy trading group—the bourgeois upper-crust who later became integrated in the Whig aristocracy, symptomatic of a nascent Industrial Capitalism. Indeed, as has already been pointed out, they militated against the growth of economic development. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw their absorption into the Whig Party and their fusion with the old reactionary ruling-class elements.

Nor was the struggle between craftsman and guild master of revolutionary consequence. The struggle was over the fruits of monopolistic and quasi-monopolistic privileges and had its roots in the past. While the decline of the craftsmen made a contribution to the proletarian stratum, it in no way altered the basic economic structure of the times. Neither were the land enclosures during these centuries directly linked with the origins of industrial capital. In fact, they did not take full effect as far as Capitalism was concerned until the latter part of the eighteenth century. What *was* a progressive



element in economic evolution was the struggle between the country bourgeoisie and the guild-masters and chartered companies, in which the urban capitalist sought to extend his domination over the small producer.

It is also true that Feudalism seriously declined in the fourteenth century, and the decline had significance for future events; especially when one remembers that the sale of lands by the old feudal nobility, creating as it did a class of yeoman farmers, meant for the nobility giving up the economic base of their political power. The Battle of Bosworth sounded their death-knell.

In attempting to evaluate the significance of the factors enumerated, much historic research has gone into attempts to assign their relative importance without any finality being reached. What can be said is that these factors were historic prerequisites to the development of Capitalism, which is a quite different thing from what Evans is trying to prove. Whatever may be the truth or untruth of Evans's assertions, the organic growth of Socialism within capitalist society has no basis in historical fact.

While factorization is as essential historically as it is mathematically, it is not the factors themselves or merely the number of factors in any given historical situation which is decisive, but what one may describe as the way they are crucially combined to set off a train of far-reaching events. Evans's all-embracing formula and abstract evolutionary concept make nonsense of history—and of Evans.

## CUTTINGS

Mr. Allen Clark, head of the Plessey engineering network, brings a new word to the City to-day. He has formed a satellite company, Plessey Nucleonics, to take over the group's interests in atomic power. It starts off with a share capital of £100,000, but is expected to build up substantially from there. . . . Its main interest is to produce instruments and control systems for Britain's new atomic power stations.

*Evening Standard*, 23/1/56.

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The stark, official fact is that one out of every two adult Americans alive to-day has been investigated—thoroughly, professionally, sometimes benevolently, sometimes ruthlessly, sometimes with his knowledge, sometimes without it. . . . The newest devices, are being used, legally and illegally, for "electronic snooping" with equipment such as tiny transistor radio tubes originally developed for rockets and even "space travel." Business executives tap employees' phones and many have installed hidden television transmitters. With some new "electronic" devices, conversations in an unwired room can be picked up two miles away.

*Picture Post*, 26/1/56.

As for there being no decisive moments in history—what was the Battle of Bosworth if it wasn't that? Or the Parliamentary struggle against monopoly culminating in the Cromwellian era? Or again the "Glorious Revolution" of 1764? And finally, the astonishing output of psychic energy brought forth by the economic and social ambitions of the small industrialist in the early nineteenth century, which left so powerful an impress on later decades? Looked at from one point of view, it may be said that the kind of history men make is not always good history, but they make it. Not only did the events mentioned make a powerful impact on the social and economic pattern of their times, but they re-orientated that pattern in a significant and far-reaching way.

If the Industrial Revolution was a link with the past, it was also a decisive break with it. All great social and economic changes are like that. Contrary to Evans's view that there are no breaks with the past, no crucial turning points, history shows discontinuity as well as continuity, not only direction but changes of direction. While it may be an exaggeration to say that the Industrial Revolution was in the order of never-to-be-repeated events, it is a fact that in its scale and tempo it was unprecedented.

That is not to say that the evolutionary concept has no place in Marxism. Every leap must be from somewhere to somewhere else; there are no sudden changes that are not linked to a less dramatic past. To say,

however, that the past has possibilities for development is only half the story. It also holds conditions for non-development. Indeed, the more rooted the forms of the past, the harder it is to overcome the obstacles in the way of changing from an old, rigid social organization to a new, more supple form of life. No society is subject to absolute evolution. Revolution, while it may be a denial of evolution from one aspect, is its affirmation from another: it is only by casting off the fetters of the past that a new social continuum can emerge and a new evolutionary process begin.

The next article in this series will be an attempt to develop further the aspects and implications of certain features of historical materialism. Just in conclusion, and to throw a further controversial brick, it seems that Evans belongs to the past more than the present in a respect additional to his old-fashioned Fabianism. His thinking has been greatly influenced by early Party thought, which largely accepted Spencer's views on the organic nature of social evolution. In the old days, many Party members held the belief that society was an organism; perhaps many still do. The fourth Principle, which refers to the working class as "the last class in the order of social evolution" is heavy with Spencerian overtones. Evans is also a disciple of Kautsky, who in his old age substituted "Social Darwinism" for Marxism. Thus the Party and Kautsky between them have done Evans more harm than good.

E.W.

WALLPAPER AT £8 10s. THE PIECE.  
Rooms as They Might Be.

*Manchester Guardian* heading,  
\* \* \* 24/1/56.

The United States Navy is considering using deaf people as ground crews for jet planes. . . . Dr. E. Page, chief of the Office of Naval Research's psychological sciences division, said to-day that jet noises "are quickly approaching the utmost limit of human endurance. . . . On the drawing boards are more powerful engines, which will be even louder."

*Manchester Guardian*, 19/1/56.

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In the week ended November 26th there were 1,820,000 workers on overtime—an average of eight hours—in manufacturing establishments rendering returns. This was 260,000 more than in August and 130,000 more than a year previously. About 34,000 operatives were on short time—losing 11 hours each on average—which was 20,000 fewer than in August and almost the same as a year previously.

*Manchester Guardian*, 12/1/56.

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Buying pictures has also in some cases replaced the buying of the more staid securities. With purchasing power of the

pound constantly falling, some are turning from gilt-edged to gilt-framed investment. They do so on the theory that however much the value of paper money diminishes, the value of a suitably painted piece of canvas will remain constant, or even appreciate.

*Evening Standard*, 26/1/56.

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The year ended 31st July, 1955, has been another successful year and the trading profits of the Group, after deducting the amount set aside to reserve for increased replacement cost of fixed assets, but before taxation, amounted to £11,675,537, as compared with £6,976,354 last year. . . . Recently the Government has asked for restraint in dividend policy, but, whilst accepting the need for curbing inflation, your Directors feel that the shareholders have for too long been left behind in the race against rising prices, and that they should be allowed to participate in the increased prosperity of the Company. Your Board is therefore recommending a final dividend on the Ordinary shares of 12½% less tax, making, with the interim dividend already paid, a total dividend for the year of 17½% less tax.

Report of Hawker-Siddeley Group.

*Manchester Guardian*, 12/1/56.



# STAGNATION IN THE COMMUNIST PARTY

The Socialist Party of Great Britain is not a large organization, though its influence and membership have increased during the years of its existence. We have never exaggerated our size or our influence. That is not the case with the British Communist Party, however.

The Communists, since their formation in 1920, have always claimed to be the vanguard, the self-appointed leaders, of the working class—the party which reflects the interests and aspirations of the broad mass of people and will lead the way to the Promised Land!

It is not necessary here to answer the questions whether the Communist Party really has anything to offer, really stands for a new and different society and way of life. The subject here considered is: Do the “masses” of this country support them? And what of their membership—is it increasing from year to year?

## Decrease in Membership.

For the first time for many years, the Communist Party has been forced to publish information about itself—not in a British publication, but in the official Communist journal published in Bucharest, Rumania.

In an article entitled *Strengthening and Extending Party Ranks—Vital Task of British Communists*, in the issue of June 24th, 1955, John Gollan, the National Organizer, frankly admitted that “... the Party did not grow and that fluctuation in membership was excessive... this state of affairs had persisted for a number of years.” Gollan continues:—

“Despite a fighting record, the principal weakness of the Communist Party during its existence in Britain has been its inability to retain new members... Recruitment to the Party, for example, has gone on steadily since 1945. If we had cut down the fluctuation in our membership by half, we would today have 44,000 members, instead of 33,000; if we had cut it by two-thirds we would today have 50,000.”

The major reason for the excessive fluctuation in membership, complains the article, is poor organization and poor methods of working. But nearer to the truth is a further statement that:—

“Sometimes in our eagerness to get members we have stressed that the intended recruit need not do this or that; and therefore have encouraged passivity.”

Another important factor, of course, is that recruits to the Communist Party—as with all other parties than the Socialist Party—need not know the policy and object before joining. After a few months or years they become disillusioned—or they may find out what the Party really stands for, as the present writer did!

After many years of stagnation and retrogression, the Communist Party has tended to succumb to the problem and accept it: “Finally,” moans “Comrade” Gollan, “as

a Party we do not like self-criticism anyway.” In fact, until the 23rd National Congress last April, the leadership had kept the real position of the Party’s fluctuation in numbers away from its own membership. Such is the democratic nature of the Communist Party!

## Activity in the Factories and Trades Unions.

Another problem for the Communist Party is that many of its members get “submerged” in the general Trade Union and Labour movement. Some argue that, to quote again from the Gollan article: “... a better job can be done inside the Labour Party than in the Communist Party.” “In fact,” the article says, “many of our comrades are working as a ginger group in trade unions and the broad Labour movement.”

Much importance is attached by the Communist Party to organizing factory branches. “Factory workers are the key workers,” therefore “the factory branch is the most important unit of Communist organization.” The Party has several hundreds of factory branches, with about 15 per cent. of the membership organized on a factory basis.” In fact, “districts have chosen the factories for setting up branches.” We wonder whether the workers in those factories are aware of this activity.

Why does the Communist Party attach so much importance to the factories and the trade unions? Are they members of the trade unions for the purpose of struggling for higher wages? Do they become shop stewards for the sole purpose of trying to improve working conditions? Or have they any other purpose? Perhaps this short passage from the pen of Lenin will give the answer:—

“It is necessary to be able to withstand all this (*the attempts of trade union leaders to keep Communists out of the unions—P.N.*), to agree to every sacrifice, and even—if need be—to resort to all sorts of devices, manœuvres, illegal methods, to evasion and subterfuge, in order to penetrate into the trade unions, to remain in them, and TO CARRY ON COMMUNIST WORK IN THEM AT ALL COSTS” (*Left Wing Communism*, p. 38. My capitals).

Unfortunately, from their point of view, while the Communists have been “penetrating” the trade union movement—by illegal methods if need be—in order to use these unions for Communist purposes, they have left their own Party to stagnate!

## What is their Policy?

Is the Communist Party one which recognizes that the present capitalist system causes and perpetuates most of the problems of society, and that therefore only its termination and replacement by Socialism is the answer to the present-day evils of war, insecurity and the like? Are they just another reform movement? Or are they a movement which functions solely in the

interests of another capitalist power, the Soviet Union?

The policy of the Communist Party at all times is to further the interests of the Soviet government. They are a fifth-column movement for Russia, but numbers of their members and particularly the younger ones do not realize this. If the Soviet government has a pact of non-aggression with Nazi Germany, the British Communist Party and all its counterparts abroad support it. If Russia is allied with capitalist Britain or America, as in the last war, then they are stout defenders of the alliance. If Russia opposes Western German re-armament, the manufacture of A- or H- bombs (outside the Soviet Union!), then the Communists are opposed too.

Is it surprising that the Communist Party in Britain is unpopular, or that it stagnates? Most working people are not socialists, but at least they can see through the zig-zag movements of the local Muscovites. And it is for that reason that so many people leave the Communist Party after a few months or years.

PETER E. NEWELL.

## Annual Conference 1929

*The following extracts are taken from the Final Agenda and Executive Committee’s Report to the 25th Annual Conference. Executive Committee, 1928:*

Adams, Banks, Bellingham, Bell, Cash, Fairbrother, Fitzgerald, Godfrey, Higgs, Hopley, Hardy, Iles, Johns, Lake, McClatchie, Morris, Uttin.

## PAMPHLETS.

The sale of the various pamphlets is only moderate. The E.C. urge members and branches to make greater efforts to dispose of large stock at Head Office.

## BRANCHES.

A requisition was signed by six members of the Party to form a Branch at Slough. The E.C. have given permission for the Branch to be constituted. The difficulties under which the Paddington Branch was labouring have been settled.

Hull Branch has been dissolved, and some of the members transferred to Central Branch.

East Ham Branch was dissolved at a meeting of the Branch held on August 21st, 1928, and practically all members have transferred to the West Ham Branch.

## RESOLUTIONS.

“That a Ballot Committee be appointed annually by the Conference to supervise and control the all Party Ballots. Any member shall be entitled to be present at the counting of the votes.”

## ITEM FOR DISCUSSION.

“Deletion of words after the word ‘Wealth’ in the Object of the Party.”



## MARXISM and LITERATURE: 6

"In every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch."  
MARX.

"It is not men's consciousness which determines their existence but, on the contrary, men's social existence which determines their consciousness." Therefore, when social existence changes, so does the nature of social consciousness; the inrush of industrialism at the end of the eighteenth century set up new modes of thought as well as a new mode of production.

Since this writer was taught in his school-days that the Industrial Revolution was a kind of inventors' prize-day, and he is aware that schoolboys still are taught that pernicious twaddle, it may not be pointless to survey the matter briefly. See the Industrial Revolution first as a climax, the culmination of three centuries of capitalist-type production growing within the old regime. "Quantitative changes, accumulating by degrees, become in the end qualitative changes," says Plekhanov. At the same time, see it as a historic leap, a new departure, because capitalism means industrial capitalism, and mercantilism and handicraft production were not that: they were preliminary, essential forms, but not earlier stages of the same thing.

Indeed, the technical and economic upsurge at the end of the eighteenth century is a palpable proof of what Marx always insisted: *men* make history. The feudal system had produced the fact and the idea of production for a market, and men, with that idea, had gone opening up the world. Doing so, they had found the necessity of scientific knowledge (just as the ancients had done) in place of religious speculation: geographer, economist and physicist were products of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century history, themselves ready to make more history. Arkwright, Watt, Crompton, Hargreaves, Huntsman were effects as much as causes, their machines nine-tenths culmination and only one-tenth inspiration.

An idea of what the Industrial Revolution meant can be obtained from a single figure. In 1771, five million pounds of raw cotton came into England: in 1841 it was five hundred million. Driven off the land by enclosure, workers flooded to where the factories were; literally, towns sprang up and grew as fast as they could be built under the palls of smoke. The populations even of the older-established steel and woollen town trebled, while country life, robbed of its former manufacturing functions, became rural indeed.

In the mid-eighteenth century, with the

steady improvement of roads, the wealthy had become travel-mad: tours of England and Scotland, as well as the fabulous "Grand Tour," were the vogue. And now, as authors and observers journeyed over Britain, they saw industrialism—and its consequences for humanity—before them. Historians differ in all sorts of matters, but in one they have no choice for unanimity—that the state of life for the great majority of working people was one in which, in Engels' words, "only a physically degenerate race, robbed of all humanity," degraded, reduced morally and physically to bestiality, could feel comfortable and at home." Poverty, from being a personal misfortune, had become the condition and the grievance of a class.

The social environment had changed: even the immediate environment of the writer, if he chose not to see the rest. Town and country now were different worlds. If he was a Londoner, he lived in a city which doubled its population between 1700 and 1820, and polluted its air a little more each year with coal-smoke. Architecture, one of the glories of the country before the Industrial Revolution, staggered before the determination of the speculative builder, concerned only with low costs and high profits. Many writers saw as Goldsmith had done, clear evidence that they were in a world

"Where wealth accumulates, and men decay";

others reacted to the poverty around them, and to the fact remarked by Trevelyan in *English Social History*:

"But even after these belated reforms in the utilitarian sphere, ugliness remains a quality of the modern city, rendered acceptable by custom to a public that can imagine only what it has seen."

Thus, the close of the eighteenth century produced a literature dominated by reactions to all that was taking place. The principal reaction was, in one form or another, a looking-back to what were considered better, happier times. It happened in painting, too. In the seventeen-nineties landscape painting, recapturing and symbolizing "England's green and pleasant land" before the coming of industrialism, replaced portraiture and "classical subjects": there were Girtin, Turner, Crome and Cotman, and later Constable himself. In literature it took two forms: the contemplative poetry of Wordsworth and his followers, and the Gothic novel.

In its heyday, the Gothic movement inspired houses, churches, pictures and furniture. At first it was simple veneration for the mediæval, an enthusiasm for pinnacles and turrets that produced and was stimulated further by works like Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* and Macpherson's *Ossian*, until it became an obsession with a made-up age of chivalry symbolized by ruined towers and crumbling masonry. The first novel actually to use this background was Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, in 1764, but the spate came in the 'eighties and 'nineties.

What Gothic romance quickly became may be gathered from the titles of its best-sellers. There were *The Necromancers* and *Horrid Mysteries* (Mr. Glowry, in Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey*, slept with it under his pillow and "dreamed of venerable eleutherarchs and ghastly confederates holding midnight conventions in subterranean caves"); Mrs. Parsons' *The Mysterious Warning*; Eleanor Sleath's *Who's The Murderer?*; Francis Lathom's *The Midnight Bell* and *Italian Mysteries*. Starting as a rebellion, they became a means of escape and finally an opiate against boredom or disquietude; in brief, the first thrillers.

A similar sort of literature was appearing in Germany and, a little later, in France. Frances Winwar's biography of George Sand, *The Life of the Heart*, speaks of "the fiction for mass consumption in which even the most reputable writers sought to outdo one another with accounts of necrophilia, nymphomania, transvestism, vampires, androgynes, bleeding ghosts—anything and everything in the literary cabinet of horrors wherewith to jolt the generation out of itself." Many of the English Gothic novels were translations or imitations of German horror tales; and, there having been no Puritan era in France or Germany, borrowed from them a certain element of fleshly love-making. The high-water mark in that sort of thing was Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk*—in its day and age, a shocker from various points of view.

The Gothic vogue wore itself out, and whatever vitality remained from the original movement went into the making of historical novels, like Scott's. The public for thrillers had been discovered, at any rate, and the conventions of crypt and crime were taken up by the boys' story-papers which began to appear in the eighteen-forties (see E. S. Turner's *Boys Will Be Boys*). The other reaction to industrialism, the romantic



revival in poetry, was far more lasting: partly because it produced an outstanding figure (which Gothicism never did) in Wordsworth, partly because it led to the formation of new rules for poetry.

The romantic poets turned to the contemplation of nature, assuming it to manifest eternal beauty as against the man-made ugliness of the machine age. Wordsworth put simply and clearly what they felt:

"To her fair works did Nature link  
The human soul that through me ran;  
And much it grieved my heart to think  
What man has made of man."

More than mere reflection, however, they laid down what should be the concerns and the language of poetry. Former poets had drawn freely on man's increasing knowledge for their subject-matter and imagery: Donne and Marvell, a century and a half earlier, had constructed elaborate metaphors from mathematical and geographical symbols. Those games, in the new code of Wordsworth and Coleridge, were out. They belonged to the inferior realm of "fancy," and the poet's subjects now must be drawn from "imagination": that is, from the effect on his mind of contemplating majestic and beautiful things in nature—woodland, mountains, tranquil streams and wild-growing flowers, the whole bucolic paraphernalia. Indeed, the new movement was spurred by a rejection of reason as well as of ugliness; repeatedly in Wordsworth's poems the man of learning is compared unfavourably with the placid rustic wight.

Note, please, that here was a new concept: beauty in nature as opposed to urban artifice. This writer has himself been thrilled by Scottish crags and enchanted by woods in the spring—because social consciousness has so conditioned him. All beauty is relative to how circumstances fix it in the eye of the beholder. There is an old but appropriate story of a townsman and a farmer gazing across the countryside together: the townsman is eloquent about the unspoiled vista, the countryman spits and says, "Thirty-bob-an-acre stuff." One can, in fact, behold today the contrast which Wordsworth, Coleridge and the others saw, and experience similar reaction. Travel over the crest of the Pennines, and you look down on miles of green, sweeping country . . . and in the valleys, like reeking dung-heaps, the dark industrial towns of the north.

A completely different aspect of life in the early nineteenth century is shown in another writer's work. The change in country life had generally eliminated the small-squire section and left only the private-income and semi-professional gentry—the remnants of the middle class. Jane Austen belonged to this class, and described it from her viewpoint as a country parson's daughter. Of the world outside that milieu of vicarage and local petty-bourgeois society, she knew nothing: when she wrote her half-dozen novels industrialism was growing, a great enclosure movement taking place, the

Napoleonic Wars nearing their climax, but one would never guess from Jane's meticulous, urbane pictures of her own society. Only a small class without social significance could produce a writer completely detached from the outer world, mirroring its own tiny bit of consciousness; it was the last time it was to happen.

There were other writers of similar environment, but less insular, all touched in some degree by the times. Maria Edgeworth was one. Using domestic settings as Jane Austen had done, she preached the Utilitarian doctrine of man's duty to society. Most novelists until now had taken for granted either the eighteenth-century view of society as a collection of similar individuals with proper stations which were determined by rank or heredity (the view canonized in the Book of Common Prayer), or the moral proposition of Clara Reeve: "The great and important duty of a writer is to point out the difference between virtue and vice, to show one as rewarded and the other as punished."

Each of Maria Edgeworth's books—*Tales of Fashionable Life*, *Belinda*, *Castle Rackrent*, *Popular Tales*—is a clear illustration of some precept. The precepts were lapped up from her father, and since he promoted social ideals which were opposite to those of the romantic poets, he is worth a glance. His friends were Erasmus Darwin, Wedgwood, Herschel, Watt and Humphry Davy; he tested new educational theories on his children and invented gadgets from a telegraph to a one-wheel carriage. His faith was that civilization through mechanical works was coming along in a nice, orderly fashion, and that humanity was making similar progress. He represented, in short, the outlook which became the classic Victorian one: the dogma of Marx's "arch-philistine, Jeremy Bentham, that insipid, pedantic, leather-tongued oracle of the ordinary bourgeois intelligence of the nineteenth century."

Finally, there is the question of the changing status of the writer. The Restoration brought a partial return to private patronage; poets—Pope and Gay, for example—were kept as secretaries by the gentry, and Pope touted among the rich at large for subscriptions to his translation of Homer. At the time of the Industrial Revolution most writers were still supported otherwise than by their sales. The number of middle-class women novelists will have been noted: they had leisure and freedom from financial worries. Wordsworth and Coleridge had private incomes, Shelley's family were well-to-do, Byron was an aristocrat. In the nineteenth century, however, literature became a commodity like everything else and the writer a producer for a market. Scott was the first novelist who ground it out just for cash, Keats the first notable poet who lived from the sales. It made all the difference.

R. COSTER.

## EDITORIAL

What sort of a journal should FORUM be? The last Delegate Meeting talked on that question for two or three hours without showing any consensus of opinion. The Committee's outlook was stated more than once in 1955, and is still the same: we want FORUM to build its own tradition as a magazine of theory, discussion and information for Socialists.

This issue contains a greater variety of contributions than we have had for some time, and we want variety. The all-important point, however, is that it depends mainly on the contributors. We want more and more articles, letters, snippets—more of everything, in fact. The flow has improved recently, but still is not enough to leave us with no worries about quantity.

As for discussion—well, that is up to the readers. In this issue, two articles rebut other people's views on aspects of the case for Socialism. That is apart from E.W.'s marathon polemic: does everyone accept its contentions about productivity and social growth? Again, is there no dissent from Coster's relating of literature to economic social history?

We ask these questions because we think they are important. Here is the basis of *real* Socialist discussion, the opportunity for anyone who wants to argue fundamentals. If he is critical of the materialist conception of history, *Marxism and Literature* is his chance to show an alternative explanation of it all. If he has a view on technical progress and abundance, E.W.'s twenty thousand words to date should provide enough to bite. FORUM is all his, if he wants to have a go. . . .

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### CORRECTION.

Last FORUM'S instalment of *Marxism and Literature* referred to the fops in Restoration plays: the word was printed as "flops." Sorry.

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Contributions to "Forum" should be addressed to the Internal Party Journal Committee, at Head Office. If they cannot be typed, articles should be written in ink on one side of the paper only, and contributors are asked to give their addresses and the names of their Branches. Contributors intending series of articles should give an indication of the scope of their series, not send merely a first article.



# Religion, Sex and Socialism

The author of "Sex Worship in the Modern World," in November's FORUM, seems to be attempting two things: to use the virgin birth speculations as a spring-board to attack Christianity, and to show that capitalism produces undesirable sexual phenomena. They are two quite legitimate enterprises, but I think he has made wrong assumptions and drawn wrong conclusions.

Caning the Churches with the big stick of their own morality is an old freethinkers' game. Cutner's *Short History of Sex Worship* contains some useful documentation, but its weakness is just that. If one doesn't accept Christianity it is hardly valid to criticize it as if one did. Phil Mellor seems to have walked right into the trap with his reference to Adam and Eve appearing naked in the Coventry miracle play. If mediæval Catholic audiences could sit and look "with complete composure" (I don't believe it) that sounds like one up to the Church, whereas Mellor's equation seems to be nudity=sex=wickedness. Of course, I don't think he believes that at all; but, as I said, he has walked right into it—hand in hand with Cutner.

The example of the pin-up girl and the ballerina is a bit of thoroughgoing bourgeois moral judgment (did it occur to the writer, I wonder, that every bishop in Britain would endorse his sentiments?). I think this is a bad sort of argument for a socialist to use because it implies a pooh-poohing of working-class enjoyments as against the lofty heights of ballet, "serious" music and so on. If Phil Mellor turns up the history books, he will find that sirens have always captured more attention than "art pure and simple" (if there is such a thing); there are

reasons for that, including the subjugation of women which made the Greek *hetirai* what they were, but it isn't new and it certainly isn't limited to the working class.

Pin-up girls are not sexual deities but sexual symbols; they personify the longings of the frustrated millions who are capitalism's creatures. That is not just a question of physical desires—it involves affection, romance and other similar things which people crave and can't get. The appeal of Diana Dors is much more than mere physique: she is *sympathique*—moist-lipped, understanding and nice and approachable. Like the Monroe girl, she is more concept than Carna. But that is a different thing altogether from sex-worship, which symbolizes actualities not aspirations—seeking, as all religious forms (once established) seek, to sanctify and preserve institutions and ideas for the good of the *status quo*.

The claim that all sensible people know the way to end prostitution is to have licensed "houses" does not make sense, unless the writer means just the way to end streetwalking. Private enterprise or nationalized, it's still prostitution. Here, Mellor has missed the chance to say "There won't be such a thing under Socialism," since prostitution is a clear product of the free-contract monogamy system.

Which brings me to the final and most important point. It is too easy to say "Only under Socialism, etc., will man treat sex in 'the proper way'": does anyone know what is the proper way? Agreed, the predominant capitalist attitudes to sex are unsatisfactory, but the assumption that there is an ideal attitude which will rear its lovely head

under Socialism is, in my view, a thoroughly mistaken one. There is sex as a biological act, but all attitudes towards it and thoughts about it are the expressions of whatever significance it acquires in a given social setting. Indeed, even the physical acts are affected by the prevailing conceptual climate: tenderness, possessiveness, abandon and inhibition are all social conditions or conventions.

One may argue that one's own attitude to sex is better than other people's, but that is a different thing from projecting this or some other attitude into the Socialist future. In fact, we *don't* know that sex will be "taken and given freely by mutual consent, but not to be worshipped or dwelt on until it becomes an obsession." We can confidently say a lot of quite important negative things—no frustration through poverty, no cruelty, no commercializing, etc.—but, on the positive side, nothing except that human needs will be satisfied. How, and in what frames of mind, none of us can say.

Will sexual life be directed towards large or small populations? Will privacy still be paramount? Will anyone think in terms of "taking" and "giving"? And what about monogamy? I don't know the answers to any of those, and they are only random thoughts. The details of life under Socialism are largely unpredictable, not because it is distant or because of not-we-but-the-majority-will-decide, but because a new social system evolves its own relationships and attitudes—often unprecedented ones—in response to the needs it finds.

That is one of the fallacies of trying to describe how people will live under Socialism, and why I have taken it up a little lengthily. Education, housing, recreation, sexual life—all these and the rest are parts of the social existence which can arise on condition that the means of production and distribution are made common property. They are not parts of the common ownership formula, however.

Common ownership is a means, not an end. It has definite, direct implications like no wars, no crises, no poverty and so none of the consequences of poverty (crime, disease and the like). And because it leaves society with no other aim than human satisfaction, we know that in matters of personal life it will be good, too; but how and in what forms it will be good, we don't and can't know—except that capitalism's conceptions of good living will probably be a long, long way away.

CORTES.

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